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# Michigan foster kids finding adoptive families

LANING (AP)—This will be a memorable holiday season for more than 240 children in the state foster care system, and the families they are joining, on Michigan Adoption Day.

Children in 34 counties throughout the state are to be legally adopted today as part of the fourth annual National Adoption Day. The national event, which was held Saturday, was designed to find permanent homes for 3,000 of the country's approximately 126,000 children in foster care.

"The goal is to increase the number of children who go to a safe and permanent home," Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice Maura Corrigan told the Detroit Free Press for a Monday story. "Let's get them out of foster care."

Michigan had 19,490 children in foster care as of late September, said Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the state Family Independence Agency. Tentative adoptive families

have been found for 4,184 of the 4,584 children available for adoption, she said.

The remaining 400 children available for adoption are considered permanent state wards who will not be returned to their birth parents.

"I think there are more challenges in adopting children from foster care," Sorbet told Booth Newspapers. "If we have sibling groups, we want them adopted together. We have older children. We have special needs children who can either be medically fragile or emotionally or physically abused."

The need for adults who are willing to adopt a teenager or pre-teen is particularly acute, Wayne County Chief Circuit Judge Mary Beth Kelly said.



Mary Beth Kelly

"These children just need love. ... These are not 'damaged' children. They are children who haven't had the permanence of a loving and stable home."

The number of adoptions of Michigan children in foster care increased from 1,959 in 1993 to 2,927 in 2002.

Experts credit changes in state and federal rules that have sped up the process for terminating parental rights and removed some of the bureaucratic roadblocks.

In recent years, hundreds of other children have been adopted from foreign countries through private agencies, voluntarily released into foster care by the birth parent, or given by the birth parent directly to a specific family.

By the time National Adoption Day arrives, 2-year-old Reginald will have become Hazel Nevins' adopted son.

Reginald, born to a drug-addicted mother,

was only a few days old when Nevins, 47, of Ferndale became his foster mother. She fed him with a dropper when he wouldn't eat and wrapped him in a blanket and held him tight when he shook violently while going through drug withdrawal.

Two years ago, Nevins asked her FIA social worker if she could adopt Reginald. It happened last Friday in a ceremony before Oakland County Chief Circuit Judge Joan Young.

The judge placed Reginald, dressed in a blazer and shiny black shoes, on her lap while she signed a series of documents. Young then looked at the toddler and said: "Guess what? It's official!"

Nevins, Young, social worker Constance Sanders and Nevins' friend began to applaud. Reginald looked around, crawled off the judge's lap and onto his mother's lap, and began to clap, too.